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ABSTRACT

In examining the role of Corax and Tisias in the development of rhetoric should be considered: (1) the recently-discovered transition from orality to literacy in the ancient Greek world, suggesting that rhetoric became a formal discipline at their hands through the medium of writing and that rhetoric existed in some form in the earlier oral culture; and (2) the religious crisis that occurred when the Syracusan tyrant Hieron was unable to exercise the religious authority required to rule, lending support to the view that Corax was a religious figure and that rhetoric existed in the earlier religious world. The gradual displacement of the old world of primary orality by the emerging world of literacy necessitated that traditional rhetoric as practiced in the oral culture be conceptualized according to new thought processes made possible by the new literacy and be expressed in the written form that literacy required for dissemination to the public. This transition implies that rhetoric existed in some form in the old oral world long before it became a "techne" (art of rhetoric). That form was probably religious in nature, as indicated by the evidence of Corax's religious role, i.e. religio-political advisor to the tyrant Hieron and logographer/etymologist (along with Tisias) engaged in divining the meaning of words. This suggests that the roots of rhetoric will be discovered in the religious world of oracular divination and of political life. (Thirty-four references are appended.) (MS)

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The Origins of Rhetoric: Corax and Tisias Reconsidered

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Abstract

This paper reconsiders the role of Corax and Tisias in the development of rhetoric by examining two factors: (1) the recently-discovered transition from orality to literacy in the ancient Greek world, suggesting that rhetoric became a formal discipline at their hands through the medium of writing and that rhetoric existed in some form in the earlier oral culture; and (2) the religious crisis when the Syracusan tyrant was unable to exercise the religious authority required to rule, lending support to the view that Corax was a religious figure and that rhetoric existed in the earlier religious world.

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In a recent anthology on the present state of scholarship in rhetoric, Enos (1983, p. 29) identifies several areas of research that need attention. One of these involves "studies that examine the emergence of rhetorical techniques in oral and written literature prior to rhetoric's canonization as a formal discipline." That is obviously an enormous task, one which this or any other single study cannot claim to achieve. However, if the proto-history or origin of rhetoric prior to its canonization as a discipline is to be examined, one of the obvious starting places is with the reputed "inventors" of rhetoric, Corax and Tisias. As students of the history of rhetoric know,

> the art of rhetoric was invented in the second quarter of the fifth century B.C. in Syracuse in Sicily. As a result of the overthrow of the Syracusan tyrants much litigation had arisen, and either Tisias or Corax or both undertook to teach a technique of judicial rhetoric to those unaccustomed to public speaking (Kennedy, 1963, p. 26).

While the names of these two rather shadowy "fathers" of rhetoric are well-known, the reason for studying them for possible clues to the proto-history of rhetoric--i.e., to the origins of rhetoric before Corax and Tisias--may be less clear. Certainly, very little has been written about these two figures by rhetorical scholars in recent years. Yet beginnings in rhetoric or any other discipline--indeed, in any endeavor--are always imposed. The point at which any idea or movement really "begins", its moment of origin, is necessarily influenced by the predisposition and perceptual set of the viewer. To say that rhetoric began with the teaching of Corax and Tisias is to acknowledge that they are traditionally seen as the originators of the techne or art of rhetoric by many later writers whose works have survived. What has changed is not the

primary sources about Corax and Tisias *per se*, but the way those sources (both in their content and context) need to be viewed.

Before any attempt is made to re-consider the role of Corax and Tisias in the development of rhetoric, it is first necessary to sketch what the sources about them are. Twentieth century scholarship tends to agree upon the identification of Corax and Tisias as reputed founders of rhetoric. Bryant (1968, p. 31) concludes that "from all the available evidence it can be safely asserted that rhetoric as a theoretical preoccupation began in Sicily in the first half of the 5th century B.C. under the leadership of Corax and Tisias." Dobson (1919, p. 12) describes Corax as the "founder of rhetoric." According to Hinks (1940, p. 61), "a lasting tradition among the ancients marked Sicily as the birthplace and Tisias and Corax as inventors of the art of rhetoric", and modern scholars "can still point to the Sicilians Tisias and Corax as its authors." Kennedy (1980, pp. 18-19) agrees that Corax and Tisias have traditionally been seen as the leading teachers of rhetoric at the time democracy developed in Syracuse in Sicily. In like manner, Russell (1970, p. 289) affirms that Corax "is said to have been the first teacher of rhetoric." Smith (1921, p. 16) also concludes that the man "who wrote the first treatise on the art of the orator (*rhetorike techne*) . . . according to a system, was Corax of Syracuse." Similarly, Wilcox (1943, p. 1) maintains that "most ancient historians of rhetoric attribute the first technical writings on oratory to the Syracusans Corax and Tisias and date their activity shortly after the fall of the tyrants in Sicily."

Nineteenth-century scholarship is no less insistent upon the identity of the founders of rhetoric. Jebb (1876/1962, v. 1, p. cxxii) describes Tisias as "the pupil of Corax" and as following "his master in further developing the topic of probability" in rhetoric. Verrall (1880b, p. 130) identifies "Korax of Syracuse" as "one of the founders of 'rhetoric,' who is so constantly mentioned in company with his collaborator Tisias that the two form a literary pair . . . ." The tendency of modern scholarship to acknowledge Corax and Tisias as the founders of rhetoric is fairly consistent.

The testimony is not unamimous, however, Empedocles of Agrigentum (born about 500 or 480, died about 430) is presented (Benson & Prosser, 1969, p. 300) as "Sicilian philosopher, scientist; 'inventor of rhetoric.'" Wilcox (1943, p. 12) refers to Quintilian's remark that Empedocles made the first advances in rhetoric. Hinks says that "the only traditional rival to Tisias and Corax as first author of the art (of rhetoric) is Empedocles, whom Aristotle in his early dialogue Sophista is said to have called the inventor of rhetoric. . . ." Aristotle's statement was quoted by Diogenes Laertios (VIII. 57, cited by Jebb, 1876/1962, v. 1, p. cxx). Empedocles' claim is no threat to the traditional pre-eminence of Corax and Tisias as the founders of rhetoric; Hinks and Jebb, like most authorities, agree that while Empedocles may well have been a prominent sage and orator, there is no evidence that he ever developed a system of rhetoric nor do any authors refer to his teaching or writing about rhetoric. In addition to Empedocles, Pythagoras was considered a founder of rhetoric by some ancient writers (in de Romilly, 1975, p. 14 & 94, ft. 41). In

fact, Diogenes Laertios (8.2.54., in de Romilly, 1975, p. 94, ft. 42) says that Empedocles is reported to have been a disciple of Pythagoras. Even so, Hinks (1940, p. 61) notes that "Aristotle himself in another work [besides the Sophista], apparently the Synagoga, set Tisias and Corax . . . as the first rhetorical theorists." The traditional claim of Corax and Tisias as founders of the art of rhetoric seems secure.

The ancient authorities who refer to Corax and Tisias include Plato, Aristotle, Cicero, and Quintillian, as well as the collection of introductions to rhetoric called the Prolegomena (Kennedy, 1963, p. 59). The clearest overview of the ancient traditions about Corax and Tisias are provided by Hinks (1940) and Wilcox (1943). Hinks (p. 62) says that "there are two traditons of the origin of Corax's rhetoric. One is that to be collected from the Minor Greek Rhetoricians in Walz's collection or Rabe's Prolegomenon Sylloge," which characterizes the rhetoric of Corax as political or deliberative, inasmuch as Corax attempted to influence the people in the new democratic state after the death of the tyrant Hieron. According to Hinks (1940, p. 62), "The other tradition is that of Aristotle as quoted by Cicero (Brutus 46)", which depicts the earliest rhetorical theory emanating at the same time from the law-courts in connection with private suits brought by citizens disputing the property settlements dictated previously by the tyrants who engineered widespread movements of people. In this second tradition, rhetoric is seen not as deliberative but as forensic or judicial. Which of these two traditions is to be believed? Hinks (1940, p. 62) expresses the generally accepted

scholarly opinion that Aristotle's

> account is to be preferred; for it is notorious that the earliest systems of rhetoric were occupied entirely with the business of judicial oratory. This is stated in the Phaedrus (261B) and is equally a matter of complaint for both Isocrates (adv. soph. 19) and Aristotle (Rhet. 1354b). . . .
> We need not necessarily disbelieve the minor rhetoricians if they tell us that Corax was active politically. But it is as a theorist, not as a practitioner, that he is important to us.

Wilcox (1943) agrees that these are the two primary traditions about the origin of rhetoric, but devotes his attention primarily to the Prolegomena, which contains the fuller accounts of Corax and were written after the third century A.D. He concludes that the Prolegomena contain two different traditions: one is best preserved in that part of the collection attributed to Sopater, and is basically worthless; the other is in R4, by an anonymous writer who seems to draw upon Timaeus (the late 4th century B.C. Sicilian historian), the value of this traditon being uncertain. The value of the Prolegomena and the traditions discernible within it will be of interest later in this paper.

Transition from Orality to Literacy

The manner in which these ancient sources are interpreted and understood should reveal the main features of the proto-history of rhetoric insofar as it is associated with, or present within, the work of Corax and Tisias. This paper examines two factors that compel and shape a re-examination of Corax and Tisias and their role in the development of rhetoric. The first of these factors is the rather recent "discovery" of the transition from orality to mass literacy in ancient Greece in the fifth century B.C. The most comprehensive overview of that transition is provided by Walter J. Ong (1982), whose analysis is followed here.

Ong argues (1982, pp. 5-15) that language is fundamentally oral, existing primarily as spoken and as heard. Language as written or committed to spatial representation is a secondary and relatively late development in the evolution of culture. The orality of language is evident in the fact that of the thousands of languages spoken in history, most have never been committed to writing at all. Those that are written are nevertheless still fundamentally oral, since the process of reading requires the reader to relate the written or visual word to the aural, sounding the word aloud or in the imagination in order to produce meaning. For that reason, writing can never fully replace orality. What writing has done, among other things, is to mask the basic orality of language. Scholarship has tended to be concerned mainly about and with written texts, simply because what is studied has generally been what is written. In contrast, in primary oral cultures--that is, those that have no awareness of writing--learning occurs not by studying but by apprenticeship, listening, and repetition of traditional wisdom in formulaic ways. In a literate society, a person who wants certain kinds of information is often told to "look it up"--because it has already been "written down." But in a society of primary orality, nothing can be looked up for the obvious reason that nothing has been written down; in such a culture, what is not repeated--spoken, heard, and re-spoken--is lost. This distinction between oral and literate cultures seems common-sensical, but has only recently been "discovered" or recovered, having been obscured by the gradual, cumulative textualization of society over roughly the last two and one-half milennia. From the traditional perspective of literate

society, predecessor non-literate cultures have frequently been termed "illiterate" or "preliterate," as if literacy were primary and orality were secondary in the development of human culture, rather than the other way around.

The story of the recent discovery of primary oral cultures is a long and complex one. As Ong's (1982, pp. 17-30) review of this process shows, the issue that precipitated the discovery was the Homeric question. While some scholars and other literate persons from classical antiquity onwards had been somewhat aware that the Iliad and the Odyssey were different from other Greek poety, it was Milman Parry in his 1928 doctoral dissertation who first clearly explained that the distinctive aspects of Homeric poetry are the result of the constraints of oral methods of composition. That method is epitomized in the Greek word "'rhapsodize', rhapsoidein, 'to stitch song together'" (Ong, 1982, p. 22); oral composition as practiced by the rhapsodist or poet of a primary oral culture was to stitch together a poem orally using prefabricated, memorized elements organized around standardized themes. The very features that the literate person is taught to reject--formulas, set phrases, usual qualifiers, all of which are cliches--are the features that Homer valued. Various implications of Parry's discovery were explained by Eric A. Havelock (1963). Homer valued cliches because his culture did; the thought patterns of a primary oral culture require constant repetition (as has already been noted), which is best facilitated by standardized formulas. The formulaic, proverb-like style of the poet or rhapsodist is typical of the style of expression which is essential for the preservation

of knowledge or wisdom in a primary oral culture through memorized repetition. However, by Plato's time (427?-347 B.C.) the Greeks had finally interiorized writing, more than three centuries after the Greek alphabet was developed about 700 B.C. Knowledge was then being stored increasingly in written texts rather than in mnemonic formulas. Havelock says that the reason Plato banished poets from his republic was that their formulas and cliches were antithetical to the abstract, objective philosophical manner of thought emerging from alphabetic literacy. In the old oral culture, performance (of a poem or anything else) was necessarily oral performance; philosophy is written, not performed. Havelock (1963, pp. 40-41) characterizes Athenian society in the first two-thirds of the fifth century B.C. (roughly just before Plato's time) as semi-literate, and the oral state of mind as Plato's primary enemy.

Corax and Tisias (remember them?) were older than Plato, flourishing before the time of Plato's birth. Despite any differences between Athenian and Syracusan society, is it not logical to assume that some phase of the transition from orality to literacy was being played out in Syracuse in 466 B.C. as well as in Athens about a century later? While the commitment to orality was probably stronger in Corax's than in Plato's day, the transition to literacy must have been in process during the time that Corax and Tisias were active. If so, what implications does such a transition have on a modern understanding of Corax and Tisias? The first and most obvious implication is that rhetoric became (or started to become) a formal discipline through the technique or medium of writing (Ong, 1971, p. 13)--the first (although no longer extant) manual of rhetoric being that

attributed to Corax or Tisias. One of the enduring questions raised by comparing the two primary traditions about the origins of rhetoric (the Prolegomena versus Cicero and Aristotle, as explained above) is the relationship between Corax and Tisias: "was Corax master, opponent, or colleague of Tisias" (Kennedy, 1963, p. 60)? Was Corax the sole author of a manual on rhetoric, or joint author with Tisias, or a teacher whose ideas were later written down for the first time by Tisias? There is general agreement that Corax was somewehat older than Tisias. Corax flourished around 467 B.C. (Bryant, 1968, p. 30), and was teaching in 466 B.C. or thereabouts, followed by his pupil Tisias (Dobson, 1919, p. 12). Verrall (1880a, p. 205) reports that some later classical writers mistakenly supposed that Tisias traveled to Athens with Gorgias in 427 B.C. and taught rhetoric there. Whatever the truth of his reported trip to Athens, Tisias was surely the junior of Corax. One of the most famous and widely-reported stories about Corax and Tisias (which is examined in some detail in the second section of this paper) is found in the Prolegomena, Rabe's no. 4 (Kennedy, 1963, p. 59), which says that Tisias was Corax's pupil who refused to pay for his instruction and went into court over the matter. So the weight of evidence tends to indicate that Corax was older than, and the teacher of, Tisias.

As to the authorship of the techne on rhetoric, the sources offer differing views. Wilcox (1943, p. 13) acknowledges that "Aristotle in [Cicero's] Brutus, 46, ascribes only one techne to Corax and Tisias jointly, which may explain why Tisias alone is mentioned in the De Inventione [of Cicero]; Quintillian seems to

credit each with a separate techne." Verrall (1880a, p. 198) concludes that Tisias authored the techne with Corax; that the techne of Corax and of Tisias "were originally not two books, but the same book, [which] is asserted or implied in every statement that we have about them." In contrast, Smith (1921) says that Corax was the author of what was probably the first techne on rhetoric. It is interesting that neither Plato nor Isocrates ever mention Corax; that Aristotle's lost Synagoge technon, which summarized earlier handbooks, is reported by Cicero (De Inventione 2.6) to have begun with Tisias; and that in the Prolegomena "the Timaeus tradition shows little interest in Tisias and much in Corax" (Kennedy, 1963, p. 63). Roberts (1904, p. 18) says that Tisias appears to have enlarged and improved the techne of Corax, "which dealt mainly, if not exclusively, with the topic of probability." The ambiguity of the authorship issue is evident in the following two conclusions:

> Corax, as Tisias' master, would appear to be properly the inventor; but whether he wrote a book himself, or bore a part in one written by Tisias, or allowed Tisias to write down his own verbal teaching, we cannot certainly know (Hinks, 1940, p. 62).

> The art of Corax and Tisias, originally taught orally, was at some point written down in notes (hypomnemata), either by the two teachers themselves or by those they taught, and copies were made and sold (Kennedy, 1980, p. 19).

The transition from orality to literacy which was certainly in progress during the fifth century B.C. means that oral methods were being eroded by increasing literacy. It may well be that Corax as the older man was more oriented to oral teaching than written treatises and that his pupil Tisias either alone or jointly with Corax wrote the techne which spread the teaching in the newly-

emerging literate culture of classical Greece. The evidence for such a position is obviously circumstantial, but the possibility is certainly congruent with what is now known about the gradual displacement of the old oral culture by a literate one at that period in history. Additional reasons for seeing Corax as having ties to the old oral culture are considered in section two of this article.

The authorship issue is significant in part because it has been asserted (Farenga, 1979, p. 1033) that "the question of rhetoric's origin cannot be separated from the question of its textualization. . . ." Undoubtedly the textualization of rhetoric is a critical--but not the only--aspect of its origin. As Kennedy (1980, p. 8) notes, both the English word "invent" (from the Latin invenire) and the Greek word heuriskein mean literally "'to discover or find out,' and only secondarily [come] to mean 'create' . . . . Greek rhetorical practice to some extent represents a continuum from the Homeric poems through the time of conceptualization . . . ." In other words, Corax and Tisias as "inventors" of rhetoric "discovered" or "found out" certain principles--of probability--but did not actually "create" rhetoric, which already existed in some form in practice. Indeed, to assume that rhetoric as a discipline was invented at the moment of its textualization, that it was created ex nihilo at that point, is to commit the same kind of error made by scholars who assumed until very recently that Homer's poetry was too good to have been composed except in writing. As has been stated, it was the Homeric questions that led to the recent discovery of the transition from orality to literacy. Since the Iliad and Odyssey were orally

composed by the Homeric rhapsodist and only subsequently written down, does it not appear probable that rhetoric existed in some form in the old oral culture for an indefinite period prior to its being written down?

That possibility is the second implication which the transition from orality to literacy has for understanding the origin of rhetoric. Ong (1971, p. 13) acknowledges that

> rhetoric as a formal discipline arises, as we have seen, out of the primary oral world, fixing attention initially on oral performance rather than writing even though it comes into being as a formal discipline only through the use of writing. To this extent, in its oral grounding, rhetoric stands on a psychologically primitive base.

What was rhetoric before it was a techne? Aristotle notes that rhetoric as practiced grows initially from natural ability; hence, before rhetoric is an art it is natural (Ong, 1983, p. 3). Similarly, Kennedy (1980, p. 6) calls the rhetoric that occurs before disciplinary conceptualization of rhetoric as an art "traditional or natural rhetoric," which occurs in all society in and through speech and oratory. What are the bridges between rhetoric as natural and rhetoric as an art? Does the art of rhetoric spring directly from natural rhetoric, or is there some intervening conceptualization of or about rhetoric that leads from nature to art? As Kennedy (1980, p. 4) defines "primary" rhetoric, it is oral persuasion as understood and practiced at the time the art of rhetoric was "invented"; "secondary" rhetoric is oriented more to a text than to speech. How was primary rhetoric understood before Corax and Tisias? And how did that understanding contribute to their "invention?" While these questions are especially difficult because they ask about rhetoric before its textualization

as a disciplinary art, they are inescapable in examining the origins of rhetoric. Insofar as rhetoric is conceptualizaed "in varying degreees in advanced societies" (Kennedy, 1980, p. 7), the possibility exists that Corax and Tisias adapted a proto-rhetoric of some kind characteristic of oral societies for the ermeging literacy of their own society. Such a proto-rhetoric would not be as fully conceptualized as their techne--or, stated less prejudicially, from less of a literary bias--this proto-rhetoric would be "conceptualized' as much or more in the fashion of the old oral tradition than in the new literate culture, (although "conceptualization" is still an abstract term that reflects a literate base and bias). Consideration of the possible contours of such a proto-rhetoric requires that attention to shifted from the first factor (the transition from orality to literacy) calling for a re-examination of Corax and Tisas to the second factor: the religious crisis.

The Religious Crisis

The commonly-held view of the immediate practical influence that led to the first theory of rhetoric produced by Corax and Tisias is the rise of democracy in Syracuse in 467 B.C. (Kennedy, 1980, p. 18). In other words, the event seen as precipitating the rise of rhetoric was political (from polis, city). While the political crisis was undoubtedly important in this regard, there was also a religious crisis which has been largely overlooked or ignored by rhetorical scholars. As Farenga explains (1979, pp. 1046-47), during the Archaic period "whatever unity and identity the polis achieved . . . was instituted by religious belief and

practice," the central event of which was sacrifice. With the transition to the Classical Age still occuring during the time of Corax and Tisias, "all crisis within the polis is thought of as religious crisis: and the solution to all crisis likewise still looked to religion and to sacrifice, its central institution, for a remedy." The tyrant, Farenga believes, was a secularized sacrificial victim.

How strange this religious issue sounds in modern ears. Because religion and state are now constitutionally separated in the U.S.A., Americans tend to assume the same separation must have existed in classical Greece. Much traditional scholarship in enshrining Greek rationalism has forgotten Greek religion, or has tended to separate religion and the polis in Greece. The scholarly redressing of this error is not as recent as the discovery of the orality-to-literacy transition, but has also often been met with considerable resistance. The modern discovery of the religious basis of ancient Greek and Roman society has been going on for more than a century. The classic work on the religious basis of the ancient city is by Fustel de Coulanges (1864/1955), the great nineteenth century French historian, whose book is firmly grounded in the writing of classical authors. The founding of a city was a formal religious (as well as political) event, attended by divination and augury (Grote, 1899), ritual purification (Fustel, 1864/1955, p. 136; Rykwert, 1976, p. 58), ritual marking of the town's boundaries (Fustel, 1864/1955, p. 137; Rykwert, 1976, p. 65), and ritual naming of the town (Rykwert, 1976, p. 59). Given the religious nature of a city's founding, it is not surprising that the citizens worshipped the city's founder (Fustel, 1864/1955,

pp. 142-46). In addition, each city (like each family) had its own gods, priesthoods, prayers, and liturgies which were truly civic or local (Fustel, 1864/1955, p. 151). So "there is a sense in which it is true to say that the polis is an independent religious, as well as political, unit" (Kitto, 1958, p. 76); it is a "spiritual entity" (Jaeger, 1939, v. 1, p. 108).

The government of the earliest cities of the Greeks and Romans was headed by a king who was both chief priest and political chief, who presided over the various civic ceremonies that were simultaneously religious and political events. When the democracies were established, the annual magistrate was still called king, or prytane, or archon because he continued to be both a religious and a political leader (Fustel, 1864/1955, p. 180). At various times some Greek cities opted for rule by a political chief who had no claim to religious authority; such a chief was called a tyrant not because he was necessarily bad (the modern connotation of the word) but because he lacked religious power (Fustel, 1864/1955, p. 179). Hence one of the problems faced by the tyrants was how to compensate for their lack of religious authority. The Syracusan tyrant Hieron founded the city of Etna in Sicily in 476 B.C. by exporting people from Catania and elsewhere to Leontini, and importing settlers to the new city of Etna on the site of Catania (Finley, 1979, p. 55). One of his reasons for founding Etna was undoubtedly so that he could be worshipped there as founder (Freeman, 1891, p. 244). In Syracuse he had no such religious influence. In order to rule there he would need to enlist the assistance of other persons with religious authority who

could advise him on religious (i.e., religio-political) matters necessary for the functioning of the city, and perhaps to carry out priestly civic duties normally handled at other periods by monarchs or republican magistrates.

It is in this period of religious crisis that one of the controversial stories about Corax occurs. In the Prolegomena Rabe no. 17 says that when democracy came to the Syracusans in 467-66 B.C. "this man Korax came to persuade the crowd and be heard, just as he was listened to while in Hieron's service" (Farenga, 1979, p. 1035; italics mine). Similarly, Rabe no. 5 provides the information that Corax had been influential at the court of Hieron (Wilcox, 1943, p. 16). Another indication (although only by implication) of Corax's influence at court is contained in Rabe no. 13, which says that managing a crowd is different from managing for a tyrant (Wilcox, 1943, pp. 14, 19). However, this story in the Prolegomena is impugned by most scholars. Wilcox (1943, p. 19) criticizes the story about Corax at Hieron's court as "basically implausible," since "the new democracy at Syracuse would not trust a creature of the tyrants." Freeman (1891, p. 549) terms the notion that Corax had considerable influence with Hieron and was practically a sharer in the tyrant's power "absurd." Rabe no. 4, which omits any reference to Corax at the court of Hiero, records the emergence of Corax at the time of the establishment of the democracy; this account is preferred by Wilcox (1943, p. 19) and most other authorities. However, Verrall (1880a, pp. 197-98) maintains that there is "no reason for disputing" the tradition that Corax "was a person of importance" in Hieron's reign. Certainly, "implausibility" or "absurdity" are not sufficient

reasons to reject the notion that one man could have survived in two or more radically different governments. History can be stranger than fiction. Indeed, it is relevant to recall here the remarkable career of Talleyrand (Charles-Maurice de Talleyrand-Perigord, 1754-1838), the French priest who

> held high position under the government of Louis XVI, the absolute monarch, under Louis XVI, the constitutional monarch, under the First Republic, under Napoleon, under Louis XVIII, under Louis Philippe (Brinton, 1936, p. 24);

since "Talleyrand prospered in societies and under forms of government so different that it hardly seems possible for one man to have done so many things with one life" (Brinton, 1936, p. ix), surviving the more modest transition from tyranny to democracy as claimed for Corax by Verrall based on Rabe nos. 5, 13, and 17 seems within the realm of possibility. In the century after Corax, a more renowned man of learning, Plato, is said (by Plutarch and by a collection of possibly spurious letters of Plato) to have travelled to Sicily after having been invited to educate the tyrant Dionysius II about the role of the philosopher-king. Twice Plato attempted this task, but both times unsuccessfully. While various aspects of this story are disputed, it is accepted by most modern historians (Finley, 1979, p. 92). The tradition claiming a role for Corax in the reign of Hieron is thus not the only instance of a Greek tyrant obtaining assistance from a man of learning, nor is it so implausible when the religious nature of the ancient city is noted.

An understanding of the role of religion in the ancient city and of the religious crisis in Syracuse attendant upon the rule of the tyrants makes a reconsideration of the possible accuracy of the story of Corax as an advisor to Hieron necessary. If Corax were a

person who was respected by the people for his religious position and piety, and if he were likewise respected and employed by Hieron as an advisor regarding the essential religious dimensions of ruling the city, then Corax's influence both at court during the tyrant's rule and in the popular assembly when democracy was established would be more plausible. The people's respect for his religious authority would permit him to weather the transition from tyranny to democracy. Of course, this scenerio is merely a supposition unless there is some evidence to support the hypothesis that Corax was a religious authority before he began to teach rhetoric to the people.

Such evidence does exist, even though it has not been widely recognized or its significance properly noted. There are three primary sources that point to Corax and/or Tisias as authorities on words. A relatively late reference by Pausanias (6.17.8) indicated that Tisias may have been a logographer; Theophrastus vaguely describes Corax as an inventor of the art of words (Kennedy, 1963, p. 60). Verrall (1880a, 1880b) calls attention to a passage in the Second Olympian Ode (lines 83-100) by Pindar, a contemporary of Corax and Tisias. A part of that passage is as follows:

> There are many sharp shafts
> in the quiver
> under my arm.
> They speak to the understanding; for most men, they need interpreters.
> The wise man knows many things by nature; the vulgar are taught.
> They will say anything. They clatter vainly like crows against the divine bird of Zeus (Pindar, tran. Lattimore, 1976, pp. 8-9, lines 83b-88)

Pindar is contrasting the wisdom of the poet's art (the "sharp shafts" from his quiver) versus the "clatter" of the crow-like

"interpreters." According to Verrall (1880a, pp. 127-30), the interpreters are two in number (as revealed by the Greek noun) and should be identified as Corax (whose name means "crow" in Greek) and Tisias. The nature of their "interpreting" is explained by Verrall in terms of the meaning of the Greek word topos and its variants. The common meaning of topos in classical Greek has to do with the "space" in which things are contained, and in classical rhetorical theory with the "places" where Aristotle says one may look for common subjects or topics. However, a second but little-known meaning of this root word in early Greek is a "conjecture" or a "divination." In this second sense, the interpreting done by Corax and Tisias involves divining an etymology, making out the meaning of obscure words and names. While this is a skill that might be expected of a grammatikos or man of letters, it is also related to the rhetorician's art. The divining of etymologies done by Corax the lexicographer is similar both etymologically and methodologically to the divining of probabilities done by Corax the rhetorician (Verrall, 1880b, p. 139). In a different article, Verrall (1880a, p. 209) concludes "that against the hypothesis that these two [Corax and Tisias] about 475 B.C. published a joint work on etymology there is no evidence whatever, and that on the contrary this hypothesis fits in well with the very little that we know for certain respecting them." Even so, other authorities (Sandys, in [Pindar] 1937, p. 27; Freeman, 1891, v. 2, p. 531) reject Verrall's identification of the interpreters as Corax and Tisias.

The century-old interpretation of Verrall deserves reconsideration because it fits in well with current awareness of the religious dimensions of the ancient city and the transition from orality to literacy. De Romilly (1975) describes the relationship between magic and rhetoric in ancient Greece. In her examination of Gorgias, she acknowledges the magical power of poetry (as irrational, as from the gods, and as a charm--p. 11). In the world of primary orality, poetry was the key to the preservation of knowledge because its form (rhythm, meter, and various other verbal patterns) was essential for the retention of the shape of memorized information (Havelock, 1963, chap. 3). In that world there existed something that de Romilly calls sacred magic; it was present in magical rituals religiously performed, the traces of which are evident in classical Greek tragedy, especially in Aeschylus (de Romilly, 1975, p. 12). This sacred magic is connected not only with poetry but also with rhetoric (de Romilly, 1975, pp. 13-16). Empedocles, fellow Sicilian of Corax, Tisias and Gorgias, is said to have practiced magical cures and incantations. The tradition of Pythagoras, which connected medical magic and rhetoric, was still strong in Sicily in the 5th century B.C. The ancient sources who considered Empedocles or Pythagoras to be the founders of rhetoric (as explained above) should not necessarily be considered guilty of bad historiography; if rhetoric as a <u>techne</u> produced by Corax and Tisias emerged out of the religious world of divination, incantation and magic, it is plausible that Empedocles and Pythagoras as prominent practitioners of such religious rituals should have been seen by some authorities (who were perhaps more in tune with the old oral culture) as founders of rhetoric. If there

were a similar religious basis of the work of Corax, Empedocles, and Pythagoras, then it should not be too difficult to affirm the religious roots of rhetoric. Gorgias certainly could have been influenced by these views of the magical power of language, even though he as "the theoretician of the magic spell of words" emphasized the science of rhetoric more than the magical mystery of words.

If that influence were true for Gorgias, it is even more plausible for Corax, presuming he was religious advisor to Hieron and creature (at least in part) of the old oral world. In the beginning there was little difference between magic and liturgy (de Romilly, 1975, pp. 13, 18), and civic liturgy continued to play an important role in the establishment and maintenance of political order throughout classical antiquity. While the view of the spoken word as magical is undoubtedly rooted in what Ong (1982, p. 31) describes as the power and action of the spoken word in a primary oral culture, that magical power of words was probably still associated more with speech than with writing in Corax' time. With a population in Syracuse as in the rest of the Greek world then that was only semi-literate, the speaking of a person with religious authority--whether in religio-political liturgies or other contexts--could have had a magical kind of effect that would have been extremely persuasive in an oral culture. So it is not improbable or implausible that a person who was a diviner of the meaning of words in a society still largely oral in its orientation could have served as diviner of the will of the gods of the city for the tyrant (i.e., as religious advisor to the tyrant), or as

interpreter of the tyrant's actions to the people, or as diviner of probabilities before the law courts. The magico-religious power of the spoken word existed in the oral world long before rhetoric became with the rise of literacy an art or _techne_ and thus likely could provide the connection between Corax the lexicographer and Corax the rhetorician.

Additional evidence of Corax's religious power as diviner/logographer/etymologist--and of Tisias' role, too--is found, appropriately enough, in their very names. The ancient Greeks' belief in the magical significance and meaning of words and proper names is well known (de Romilly, 1975, p. 18; Verrall, 1880b, p. 133). That belief is a central factor in the most oft-repeated story about Corax and Tisias (that of their famous law suit about the fee Tisias refused to pay to Corax for instruction in rhetoric). A part of the dialogue between them (Rabe no. 4, in Farenga, 1979, p. 1052) is as follows:

> _Tisias_. I am taking you to court over the fee, and if I persuade them not to make me pay it, then I wouldn't have to pay since I succeeded in being persuasive. If, on the other hand, I don't have the ability to persuade them, then I still would not have to pay since you wouldn't have taught me to be persuasive.
>
> _Korax_. And I too am taking you to court, and if I persuade them to let me take the fee, I would take it since I succeeded in being persuasive. If, on the other hand, I don't persuade them to let me take it, then I still ought to take it since I have educated pupils good enough to surpass their teacher.

The court dismisses the case with the line, "From a bad crow (_korax_), bad eggs!" This obvious play on the name of Corax is characterized by Jebb (1876/1962, v. 1, p. cxxiii) as more of a comment on the unpopularity of rhetoric than of the nature of the

earliest rhetoric. However, an exploration of the meaning of the name of Korax does indicate something about the origins of rhetoric.

While almost all scholars of rhetoric have noted the pun on Corax's name, they have not investigated the various relevant meanings of the "crow" as understood in ancient Greece. In mythology, the word "crow" is used collectively for various "black, oracular, carrion birds," especially the raven, with which it is often confused because of the similarity of the two words for crow and raven in Latin as well as in Greek; an additional symbolic association about the "crow" is that he is a chatterer: oracular, a messenger, a bearer of tales and augury (de Vries, 1974, p. 12). Corax was not only a chatterer (as his rhetorical descendents have been often unflatteringly characterized) but also an oracular figure, one who casted auguries and divined the meaning of obscure words and events. How appropriate that Corax, the crow, should be not only a talking bird but also a bird who sees in an oracular way things that other miss. Such a crow would have been well-adapted to the religious life of the ancient city as the speaker of the civic liturgies and as diviner of obscure meanings so prized by the ancients. To ignore these implications of Corax's name is to dismiss relevant evidence because it does not fit modern views of the meaning of names, even though it does fit the ancient Greek view. Corax, the talkative, oracular crow, was a diviner of the meaning of words before he was a diviner of probabilities.

That the ancients should have seen the crow as oracular is not surprising inasmuch as the Greeks saw all birds as omens, as Aristophanes reminds us:

An ox or an ass that may happen to pass,
A voice in the street or a slave that you meet,
A name or a word by chance over-heard,
If you deem it an omen, you call it a bird. (Aves, 719, trans. Rogers, in Harrison, 1921 & 1927/1962, p. 99)

The name of Corax, the crow, is an omen of sorts in studying the origin of rhetoric, insofar as the journey from proto-rhetoric to the art of rhetoric is described as the crow flies. In addition to being an oracular chatterer, the crow was also sacred to Apollo (Bell, 1982, p. 58), as was the eagle to Zeus and the owl to Athena (Harrison, 1921 & 1927/1962, p.99). Could rhetoric (especially proto-rhetoric), like the crow, be closely associated with Apollonian religion? Does the fact that the Kouretes (those Initiated Young Men who served the early Greeks as primitive magicians and seers) had as their mother Kombe the Crow (Harrison, 1921 & 1927/1962, pp. 26-27, 116) imply that Corax as rhetorician was nurished by Corax as seer? Does the antipathy of the owl and the crow (Harrison, 1921 & 1927/1962, p. 113, ft. 3), the fact that crows as enemies of Athene were not allowed to visit the Acropolis (de Vries, 1974, p. 120) signify the hostility that developed between owlish philosophy and crowing rhetoric? The significance of names to the Greeks would make such connections worthy of serious consideration.

Also of some significance in understanding the origin of rhetoric is the name Tisias. Because of the deep-rooted Greek penchant for seeing names as meaningful, it would be well to see what possible meaning lies behind the name of Corax' collaborator, Tisias. An essential clue is offered by Jebb, who, in an essay on the "Ancient Organs of Public Opinion," discusses the Greek word

tis, an indefinite pronoun: tis is "the average man, who represents public feeling in Homeric society" (Jebb, 1907, p. 130). For instance, during the fight over the corpse of Patroclus, tis says that he and his friends will be forever disgraced if they let the Trojans carry off Patroclus' body (Jebb, 1907, pp. 130-31). After the heroic age which produced the great epics,

> our Homeric friend Tis is silent. Or, rather, to be more exact, Tis ceases to speak in his old character, as the nameless representative of the multitude, and begins to speak in a new quality. The individual mind now commences to express itself in forms of poety which are essentially personal, interpreting the belief and feelings of the poet himself. Tis emerges from the dim crowd, and appears as Tyrtaeus, . . . or as Sappho, . . . or as Pindar . . . . (Jebb, 1907, p. 134)

The transformation of tis from the average man or everyman to particular, individual persons parallels the transition from orality to literacy, and of poetry from the instrument of preserved cultural communication to a vehicle for personal expression. It is this transformation that Tisias by name represents in the development of rhetoric. To the extent that his name is indicative of his role, Tisias was the author of the first manual on rhetoric (probably based on the oral teaching of Corax), which moved rhetoric out of the exclusively oral world and into the written world where it was available to every man who could read. The recording of Corax's teachings in written form for every interested reader by Tisias (with or without Corax' assistance) is what enabled later classical writers to identify Corax and/or Tisias as the founders of rhetoric, and what the name of Tisias indicates about his function.

When Corax and Tisias are re-examined in light of the context in which they worked, their contributions to the "founding" of rhetoric become clearer. The gradual displacement of the old world of primary orality by the emerging world of literacy necessitated that the traditional or primary rhetoric as practiced in the oral culture be conceptualized according to the new thought processes (involving abstraction, objectivity, etc.) made possible by the new literacy and be expressed in the written form that literacy required for dissemination to the public (as Tisias' name indicates). If this transition from orality to literacy was significant in the "invention" of rhetoric by Corax and Tisias, such a transition implies that rhetoric existed in some form in the old oral world long before it became a techne. That form was probably religious in nature, as has been indicated by the evidence of Corax's religious role: oracular and talkative crow, religio-political advisor to the tyrant Hieron, logographer/etymologist (along with Tisias) engaged in divining the meaning of words. Consequently, to the extent that this line of analysis has any explanatory validity about the origin of rhetoric, the roots of rhetoric will be discovered in the religious world (probably Apollonian) of oracular divination and of political life. Further uncovering of those roots will be the subject of another paper.

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